

LOYALTY IN FLAMES

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Brown's Plea for Justice and Reconciliation

Gentlemen of the Committee,

I come before you not as an enemy of America, but as a man who has lived through the ruin that this rebellion has wrought. My name is Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Brown of Georgia, an officer to His Majesty's service; though in the mouths of many, that very title has been stripped of its rank and replaced with the cruel epithet "Burnfoot."¹ It is a name I never chose, but one that has been seared into me by fire and by the hands of those wretched peoples who call themselves Patriots. Let it stand as witness to the price I paid for loyalty to the crown, a price that many Loyalists, such as I, across these states continue to pay in silence.² Upon my honor, I do swear that I was not led by even a shred of obstinacy, but by conviction. My loyalty was no blind devotion to a distant monarch, but a faith in the rule of law, the sacred bond that rests between subject and sovereign. I believed if that order was to diminish, chaos would soon pursue, and in that, I have been proven right.

When I arrived in Georgia in 1774, I came not as a soldier but as a settler. I had purchased some five thousand acres on the Savannah River, built homes and mills, and employed dozens of laborers to cultivate the land which I had named Brownsborough.³ In those days, not too long ago but now a faint memory to the mind, Georgia was a place of great promise. The soil rich, the rivers full of life, and trade flowing as gracefully as those aforementioned streams. I had no quarrels of significance with my neighbors, nor did I have any desire to raise arms against them. We had all been honest men. But when the revolution began, envy took the seat of law. Even through pressure, I would not forswear my allegiance to my King. For that fidelity, I was dragged from my home by a mob. These so-called "Sons of Liberty" tarred and feathered me,

¹ Wayne Lynch, "The Making of a Loyalist," *Journal of the American Revolution*, August 28, 2016, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2014/01/making-loyalist/> .

² Jim Piecuch, "Loyalist Leadership in the Revolutionary South," *Journal of the American Revolution*, August 28, 2016, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/07/loyalist-leadership-in-the-revolutionary-south/>

³ "Thomas Brown," American Battlefield Trust, accessed November 2, 2025, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/thomas-brown>.

scalped me, and set my feet aflame.⁴ From that hour I have suffered, and the cause of “liberty” left its mark in the form of fire upon my body. For weeks I lay near unto death, my body torn and blackened, my mind haunted by the jeers of those who had wrought it. They had paraded my suffering as a triumph, crying shouts of “liberty.” In those cries I learned what manner of freedom those men truly sought: one obtained by cruelty, and maintained by fear.

When sufficient strength eventually returned to me, I fled south to East Florida with hundreds who, like myself, had been despoiled for conscience's sake.⁵ There I raised a corps of refugees—known as the East Florida Rangers, later known as the King’s Rangers—men loyal yet homeless.⁶ In other words, my corps was made not of mercenaries, but of honest men who had driven from their farms and homes as I. Some with lost family, and others who bore wounds like mine. With this I defended the southern frontier, from the swamps of Georgia to the uplands of Carolina. We took up arms, not for the sake of plundering, but that we might one day reclaim the land that we had been cast out. At Augusta I was besieged twice, and in the second assault I was struck through both thighs, yet I held the post until all hope was spent.⁷ We fought on though our powder spent, our rations spoiled, and our wounds unhealed. For us, surrender bore a symbol of shame. Better to perish in loyalty to His Majesty than to prosper in rebellion. Through

⁴ Lynch, “The Making of a Loyalist.”

⁵ Robert Scott Davis, “Portraits of Southern Partisans: Likenesses of Thomas Brown and Elijah Clarke,” *Journal of the American Revolution*, August 28, 2016, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/04/portraits-of-southern-partisans-likenesses-of-thomas-brown-and-elijah-clarke/>.

⁶ Steven J. Rauch, ““An Ill-timed and Premature Insurrection”: The First Siege at Augusta, Georgia, September 14–18, 1780,” *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution*, 2005, <https://southern-campaigns.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/v2n9.pdf>. Gary D. Olson, “Thomas Brown, Loyalist Partisan, and the Revolutionary War in Georgia, 1777–1782, Part II,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (1970): 203–206, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40579065>.

⁷ Rauch, ““An Ill-timed and Premature Insurrection””, 10, 17. Olson, “Thomas Brown, Loyalist Partisan, Part II”, 191.

every hardship I forbade any form of cruelty, bidding that my men fight “according to the rules of humanity,” for even in civil war some measure of honor must be to remain.⁸

My estate in Georgia—its fields, houses, and laborers—was seized by the rebels and declared forfeit.⁹ The British crown repaid but a portion of my loss.¹⁰ What was once prosperity is now but of memory. Even so, many who stood with me have fared far worse: beggars in exile, their names reviled, and their property gone to those who call themselves Patriots. We have been accused of treason, yet our only crime was constancy, obedience to the laws beneath which we were born: that of His Majesty. I challenge you, seek beyond my own misfortunes, and you shall see scores of stories the same. Men hung upon their very gates, women cast mercilessly into the streets, children wandering in exile.¹¹ Communities in their entirety reduced to memory simply for clinging to their oath. If this be liberty, then so God save us from its mercy.

Make no mistake gentlemen, the struggle in the South was no glorious revolution, it was a civil war amongst neighbors. Each side suffered greatly, each side committed acts that mercy itself must blush to name. What inflamed our torment was not the sword that of strangers, but that of a familiar hand once called friend. Brother rose against brother, and the hearth that once proclaimed comfort set ablaze in the scene of bloodshed. I do not stand here today to claim the Loyalist hand was unstained, but that we did not choose the savagery that swept the land; we were forced into it. We rightfully fought to preserve order where anarchy reigned and to defend property when plunder was called patriotism, similar to that of privateering.

Thus I represent my peoples not in bitterness but in earnest hope that justice may at last prevail. We Loyalists were as well Americans. Settlers, farmers, merchants, simple men who

⁸ Gary D. Olson, “Dr. David Ramsay and Lt. Colonel Thomas Brown: Patriot Historian and Loyalist Critic,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 77, no. 4 (1976): 257–267, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27567405> .

⁹ Davis, “Portraits of Southern Partisans.”

¹⁰ James H. O'Donnell, “A Loyalist View of the Drayton-Tennent-Hart Mission to the Upcountry,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 67, no. 1 (1966): 26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27566616>.

¹¹ Rauch, “An Ill-timed and Premature Insurrection”, 13, 17.

loved this land. We ask not for restoration of the empire, nor any vengeance upon those who wronged us. We ask only for acknowledgement and such recompense as equity and honor that our sufferings be not forgotten. If this new so-called Republic is to be founded upon liberty, then let that liberty be tempered with mercy. If it claims to uphold the law, let it also restore those whom the law had abandoned. I beseech you, gentlemen, that you leave not the Loyalists as strangers in their own land. Remember that our loyalty, though defeated, was not disgrace. We ask you restore to us our good names, and grant us the justice that has been denied all these years. Let reconciliation, not ruin, be the lasting fruit of your Revolution. May this Congress prove true that liberty and justice are not at odds, but one and the same.

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